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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

April 18, 2006

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AND INFRASTRUCTURE
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INFRASTRUCTURE PROTECTION AND CYBERSECURITY

DEMOCRATIC CAUCUS
REGIONAL WHIP

CONGRESSIONAL BRAIN
INJURY TASK FORCE
CO-CHAIR

The Honorable Donald Rumsfeld
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Rumsfeld:

It has been almost three years since President Bush proclaimed to the world, "Mission Accomplished" in Iraq. The mission was not accomplished. Today I ask that you resign as Secretary of Defense due to your failed leadership in executing this war. It has become clear to me, many of my colleagues in Congress, and an abundance of high ranking military personnel, that your continued leadership and management of the war in Iraq is not in the best interest of our nation. In my qualified opinion there has been a dereliction of duty on your part as Secretary of Defense and I believe you have an obligation to the American people to do the right thing.

As of the date of this letter, our nation has now been at war in Iraq for more than three years and it has resulted in the death of 2,377 American soldiers. With no end in sight, this war will clearly outlast World War II. Throughout the many stages of this operation, your actions as the head of our Armed Forces are at best questionable. Before we had even invaded Iraq you were among the coterie of advisors to President Bush responsible for pushing failed intelligence on weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) that led to our military actions. You stated in March 2003, "We know where the WMDs are." Three years later every official report from Iraq provides no solid evidence that Iraq had any such arms at the time. Had Members of Congress known the full truth behind the justification for going to war our nation would not be in its current predicament.

At a time when foreign diplomacy is key, your statements and actions have pushed our nation further towards isolationism to the detriment of our soldiers abroad. In January 2003, as preparations were being made to invade Iraq, you referred to two of our strongest NATO allies as "old Europe." Your arrogance at a time when coalition building was needed has left our nation to bear almost the entire burden of the Iraq war. To this date, the United States has suffered ninety-one percent of the coalition deaths in this war, a stark contrast to the true international coalition we had during the first Persian Gulf War. Your term as Secretary of Defense has contributed to the disaster on the domestic front and you have managed to lower our standing and goodwill in the international community.

In the military, any good soldier knows that the chain of command must be respected and strictly adhered to. As Secretary of Defense your lack of leadership has left our soldiers without a clear plan for victory. It has become evident that you have ignored the advice of our nation's top military generals that more American troops were needed to ensure victory in Iraq. General Eric Shinseki, then the Army Chief of Staff testified to the Senate Armed Services in February 2003 that "something on the order of several hundred thousand soldiers" would be required to successfully complete the mission and ensure peace. Instead of heeding this advice you denigrated General Shinseki's expertise on the issue by stating, "The idea that it would take several hundred thousand U.S. forces I think is far off the mark." You have stubbornly stuck with this flawed strategy despite the fact that the constant strain of fighting an insurgency in Iraq has left our Armed Forces seriously undermanned. General Paul Eaton, who has also called for your resignation, said it best when he wrote that "the Army finds itself severely undermanned — cut to 10 active divisions but asked by the administration to support a foreign policy that requires at least 12 or 14."

You also demonstrated seriously flawed foresight when you stated that the war in Iraq "Could last six days, six weeks, I doubt six months." It seems clear that you believed that fighting uniformed Iraqi soldiers would be our greatest challenge and that we would be viewed as liberators by the Iraqi people. However, most military and foreign policy experts at the time believed that the Iraqi Army would be no match for our military forces and that our greatest challenge would be to hold together the various factions in Iraq. More than three years later, those experts have been proven correct and your statements naïve since more American soldiers have been killed after major combat operations were declared over.

As the Secretary of Defense it is your sworn duty and responsibility to oversee and direct the actions of our nation's Armed Forces. It has been evident that not only did you fail to prevent the abuse of Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib prison, but in fact you made a concerted effort to cover up the extent of the abuses taking place. You knew as far back as November 2003 that Iraqi prisoners were being treated in a way that was inhumane and illegal by any standard. Six months later the truth was finally revealed. An investigation led by Major General Antonio Taguba reported widespread abuses in the detention of Iraqi prisoners. This information was known to you long ago and yet the first time that anyone ever heard of these incidents was in the release of the horrific photos taken in the Abu Ghraib prison. Members of Congress were never told the true extent of the abuses taking place; instead we were left to find out the truth when it was revealed to the general public. The most galling indication of this cover-up was the fact that even President Bush, our nation's Commander-in-Chief, first found out about the abuse of Iraqi prisoners while watching national television. This incident in itself shows that you have failed the Commander-in-Chief as Secretary of Defense and should relieve yourself of the responsibilities of your office. It is inconceivable that you would leave both the Executive and Legislative branches of our government in the dark regarding a critical foreign policy issue. Your actions clearly go against the dictates and procedures of your position as Secretary of Defense.

Your disregard for the facts on the ground have led many in this Congress to believe that you operate with blinders and have shut the truth out of your own echo chamber. Clearly, the insurgency against our occupation continues to grow strong, at the same time the Iraqi people divide themselves into warring factions--yet you continue to work as if our mission has been achieved. In April 2003, as our US soldiers were just beginning to understand the task of building a post-Saddam Iraq, you retorted that "stuff happens" in response to the looting that was taking place. These incidents of looting, which you so casually dismissed, were a sign of the coming unrest that became the insurgency currently threatening our soldiers in the field. Ambassador L. Paul Bremer agreed that inadequate military staffing led to instability in the country and encouraged rampant looting. Time and time again you have minimized and even ridiculed the problems that exist within Iraq, while failing to provide the best strategic plan for our Armed Forces to succeed. As we speak, the people of Iraq are warring amongst themselves because of sectarian divisions which have only been exacerbated by our continued military presence. Yet, you act as if this daily violence is only a side note and not the onset of a destructive civil war. Iraq's own former interim Prime Minister Iyad Allawi has stated that, "If this is not civil war, then God knows what civil war is." Instead of devising a new military strategy for success, you decided to once again malign your critics by writing that if Americans were to turn away from Iraq, it would be "the modern equivalent of handing postwar Germany back to the Nazis." This analogy demonstrates both your lack of understanding of history and the realistic situation as stands in Iraq, truly an untenable position for our nation's Secretary of Defense.

Few Members of Congress from either side of the aisle believe you represent the best option as Secretary of Defense to create a stable Iraq and finally bring our Armed Forces home. The men and women of our Armed Forces have done everything requested of them. Our nation, and indeed the world deserve to know that there is accountability for failure from America's leaders. I hope you will take my words to heart and resign your office for the good of our nation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Bill Pascrell Jr." with a stylized, cursive script.

Bill Pascrell, Jr.
Member of Congress